

The Tables of Testimony

by George Warnock

The sermon explores the significance of the tables of testimony, highlighting the difference between the old and new covenants and God's purpose in providing a new and glorious way.

Scripture: Galatians 3:24

Topics: "New Covenant", "Idolatry"

Description

George Warnock preaches about the journey of the Israelites in the wilderness, highlighting their struggle with idolatry and the inability to keep the law, leading to the breaking of the tablets by Moses. He emphasizes how the law revealed man's helplessness and paved the way for the New Covenant, showing the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the weakness of the flesh. Warnock discusses the significance of God's new covenant, where He writes His laws on the hearts of His people, enabling them to love and serve Him on a higher plane than under the law.

Transcript

These likewise were laid away in the ark of the covenant. Moses had been up on the mount with the LORD for 40 days and 40 nights, receiving the oracles of God and the pattern of the Tabernacle. The sight of the glory of the LORD was "like devouring fire" as the children of Israel beheld it; but Moses went right into the midst of the cloud and talked "face to face" with God. Before he returned to the camp God gave him two tables of stone, "written with the finger of God" (Ex. 31:18). But in the meantime the children of Israel were getting restless, and gathering together before Aaron they requested that he should make them "gods" which would go before them, as Moses seemed to have disappeared. Aaron yielded to them and made the golden calf, which the children of Israel began to worship. Though a redeemed people because of the passover lamb which had been sacrificed in Egypt, the idolatrous spirit of Egypt still clung to them. They had been delivered out of Egypt, but Egypt had not been taken out of them; and this is what the wilderness story is all about. As Moses returned from the mount with the two tables of testimony in his hand, and saw their rebellion and idolatry, he shattered the tables at the foot of the mountain. It speaks to us of a broken law, the law which no man could keep, the law which was later to be called "the ministration of condemnation" and "the ministration of death." God knew that the law would become this kind of ministration before He gave it, but man in his self-confidence would never believe it until he proved it for himself. And God had to show him, through the ministration of the law, the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the weakness of the flesh, and demonstrate man's inability to respond to God's holy requirements. Therefore the law accomplished nothing for man except this (and of course this is important): it paved the

way for the manifestation of the New Covenant by revealing man's helplessness and depravity, and acting like a "schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Gal. 3:24).

Moses, as a true priest of the Lord, interceded on behalf of the people, and God spared them, judged them, and instructed Moses to lead them forward to the Promised Land. For the task before him Moses sought the Lord for added grace and added glory. "Shew me now thy way," he pleaded; and again, "Shew me thy glory" (Ex. 33:13, 18). Once again Moses is called up into the Mount of God; and once again God writes His holy law upon the two tables of stone that Moses took up with him. But for these two tables of the covenant God had a different purpose in mind.

God does not really repeat Himself--at least not in exactly the same way. Never does He do anything the second time, in like manner as He did it the first time. Let us always bear this in mind as we anticipate the restorations of God which He has promised in His Word. When He restores that which was lost, it is restored on a higher and more glorious level than before. Failing to recognize this can only lead to frustration, as we vainly seek to restore some religious structure of the past which God had used and then laid aside. God does not make a "second try," and then a "third try." He is doing exactly as He had planned. Therefore the second tables of the covenant did not mean that God was trying again. God was doing something new. This time God commanded Moses to put the tables inside the ark of the covenant. The ark was covered over with the mercy seat, behind the veil, in the holy of holies, entirely beyond the reach or the view of a disobedient and erring people.

God would instruct us that in giving the old covenant He knew that man could not keep it; and that in giving the new covenant, He Himself would be responsible to see that it was fulfilled. He Himself would write the new covenant upon the hearts and minds of His people. He took away the old covenant which demanded righteousness, and brought in the new covenant which provided it. He did not establish the new covenant so that man could sin and still be free from condemnation; but rather that man might be made free from both the sin and the guilt of it, and might love Him and serve Him on a far higher plane than was ever possible under the law. For the full intent of the law was that man should love the Lord God with all his heart and mind and strength, and his neighbor as himself. And when this has been fulfilled in the hearts of men, God is completely satisfied. God is Love... and therefore He cannot be satisfied until His own nature and character is formed within His people, who were created in His image. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:34).

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